

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION UN

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 3998

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, PINT, LE, SY, US

SUBJ: PRES. ASSAD'S COMMENTS TO ROWLAND EVANS REGARDING LEBANON
AND MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

1 COLUMNIST ROWLAND EVANS GAVE US BRIEF RUN-DOWN OF HIS TWO-HOUR INTERVIEW WITH PRES. ASSAD EVENING JULY 11. THERE WAS LITTLE NEW IN ASSAD'S REMARKS BUT HE OBVIOUSLY WISHED TO USE OCCASION TO EXPLAIN SYRIAN POLITION IN LEBANON. HE SPOKE AT LENGTH OF LEGITIMACY OF SYRIA'S ROLE IN LEBANON AND SYRIAN IMPARTIALITY VIS-A-VIS CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS. SOME OF HIS POINTS FOLLOWS: (1) WHEN SYRIA ENTERED LEBANON IS WAS AT REQUEST OF THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITIES AND THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS. SYRIA'S ACTION IN SUPPORT OF CHRISTIANS EVOKED MUCH CRITICISM IN THE ARAB WORLD BUT SINCE IT WAS IN THE INTEREST OF LEBANON SYRIA PAID NO ATTENTION. IT DID ITS DUTY AND STOPPED THE FIGHTING. IT MADE MANY SACRIFICES. IMPORTANT CHRISTIAN LEADERS IN LEBANON

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SUPPORT SYRIA'S ROLE. THEY INCLUDE A MAJORITY OF CHRISTIAN DEPUTIES IN THE LEBANESE PARLIAMENT. (2) SYRIA PUT ITS FORCES AT THE DISPOSAL OF LEBANON TO ESTABLISH SECURITY. NO MILITARY ACTION WAS AUTHORIZED EXCEPT TO RESPOND TO FIRE. DURING ALL MY CONTACTS WITH PRES. SARKIS, ASSAD SAID, I REPEATEDLY TOLD HIM OUR FORCES WERE UNDER HIS COMMAND AND LEBANON COULD USE THEM TO ESTABLISH

SECURITY ANYWHERE THAT HE AS PRESIDENT WISHED. SARKIS IS NOW TALKING TO THE FACTIONS BUT I HAVE LEARNED HE HAS NO CONTROL OVER THE PHALANGE AND THE CHAMOUNISTS. IN OUR LAST CONVERSATION HE TOLD ME HE DID NOT GAVE MUCH HOPE THE MILITIAS COULD BE PERSUADED TO GIVE UP THEIR PLANS FOR PARTITION. (3) IT WOULD BE EASY TO WITHDRAW FROM LEBANON OR FROM BEIRUT WITHIN HOURS AND LET THINGS EVOLVE, ASSAD SAID. ONLY SYRIA, HOWEVER, CAN STOP THE BLOODSHED. IF SYRIA WITHDREW THE FUTURE WOULD BE WORSE THAN THE PAST. (4) ASKED ABOUT ISRAEL'S CONTACTS WITH THE PHALANGE/CHAMOUNISTS, ASSAD SAID THAT SYRIA KNEW THEY HAD OCCURRED BUT INITIALLY DID NOT GIVE THEM MUCH IMPORTANCE. ISAREL, HOWEVER, HAD RECENTLY MULTIPLIED ITS CONTACTS IN ORDER TO OBSTRUCT THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING SECURITY IN LEBANON. IT HAD PUSHED THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS TO PICK A FIGHT WITH THE ADF. THERE WAS, THEREFORE, A LINKAGE BETWEEN WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN LEBANON AND THE LARGER MIDDLE EAST QUESTION. WHAT ISRAEL HAS DONE IN LEBANON WILL REFLECT ADVERSELY ON ISRAEL IN THE FUTURE, ASSAD SAID. SYRIA BELIEVED ISREAL HAD AGENTS WORKING WITH THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS BUT IT COULD NOT BE PROVEN. HE KNEW, HOWEVER, THAT THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS HAD RECEIVED WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION FORM THE ISRAELIS. (5) ASKED ABOUT US POSITION TOWARD LEBANON, ASSAD REPLIED THAT USG WAS KEEPING IN GOOD TOUCH WITH SYRIA. HE NOTED THAT SECRETARY VANCE HAD GIVEN THE

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CORRECT ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT LEBANON AT HIS JULY 10 PRESS CONFERENCE BUT HE THOUGHT THE SECRETARY COULD HAVE SAID MORE. HE COULD, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE MADE A CLEARER DISTINCITION BETWEEN ISRAEL'S INVASION OF LEBANON AND SYRIA'S ACTION TO SAVE LEBANON AT THE REQUEST OF THE LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT. HE COULD ALSO HAVE CORRECTED EXAGGERATED CASUALTY FIGURES.

2. ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS, ASSAD SAID THE FOLLOW-ING: (1) THE ANSWER TO EVANS' ASSERTION THAT SADAT INITIATIVE HAD AT LEAST HAD POSITIVE EFFECT ON US PUBLIC OPINION, ASSAD SAID HE SAW NO EVIDENCE THAT SADAT'S VISIT TO JERUSALEM HAD STRENGTHENED THE US RESPONSE TO THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT. HE DID NOT LIKE IT EVEN WHEN AN AMERICAN VISITED JERUSALEM, PARTICULARLY WHEN HE DID ALL THE THINGS THAT VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE HAD DONE DURING HIS VISIT. (2) WE WANT SADAT COMMITTED TO COLLECTIVE ARAB POLICIES AND DECISIONS. (3) A SEPARATE NEGOTIATION OR A SEPARATE AGREEMENT CANNOT LEAD TO A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION. WE DO NOT SEE HOW RESULTS OF SADAT'S INITIATIVE COULD HELP A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION. WE HAVE NOT COMPLAINED OFFICIALLY TO

THE US ABOUT THIS BUT OUR VIEW IS CLEAR. (4) ASKED ABOUT PERIOD OF TRANSITION ON WEST BANK AND GAZA, ASSAD SAID THAT SYRIA HAD NEVER REJECTED SUCH AN IDEA BUT HOW WAS IT A STEP FORWARD? WHY NOT AGREE TO A SOLUTION IMMEDIATELY? WHAT IS JUST NOW WILL BE JUST THEN. AFTER FIVE YEARS WE WOULD ONLY BE STARTING ALL OVER AGAIN. ONE CANNOT PRETEND FIVE YEARS OF NO SOLUTION IS THE SOLUTION TO THE WEST BANK.

3. EVANS THOUGHT HIS ARTICLE WOULD APPEAR FRIDAY
AND ASKED THAT ASSAD'S COMMENTS TO HIM BE PROTECTED
UNTIL THEN.
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